

Romaine Announces Heightened Enforcement and Proposes New Legislation to Increase Fines and Penalties in Town Wide Fight Against Illegal Multi-Family Housing and Off-Campus Student Housing

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More than 100 Civic leaders and residents join in support of the Supervisor's actions to fight back and improve the quality of life in affected neighborhoods



Supervisor Ed Romaine (center) speaks to the press and a crowd of over 100 civic leaders and residents during a press conference to announce his town wide policy of heightened enforcement and proposed legislation aimed to strengthen the Town's power to fight back against illegal multi-family housing, including off-campus student housing in the Stony Brook and Setauket community. Also pictured are Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld (second from left) Deputy Town Attorney David Moran (third from left), County Legislator Kara Hahn (third from right) and Tony DeRosa from the Stony Brook Concerned Homeowners (second from right).

Farmingville, NY - On Monday, March 25, Supervisor Ed Romaine held a press conference at the Stony Brook Fire Department Sub Station #2 to announce a town wide policy of heightened enforcement by the Law Department and his proposed legislation aimed to strengthen the Town's power to fight back against illegal multi-family housing and improve the quality of life in affected neighborhoods. He also gave an update on some of the investigations currently being carried out by the Town's Law and Building Departments in regard to off-campus student housing in the Stony Brook and Setauket community. The Supervisor was joined at the press conference by Suffolk County Legislator Kara Hahn, Deputy Town Attorney David Moran, and over 100 civic leaders and local residents who have led recent protests against student housing in their neighborhoods.



Supervisor Romaine (right) with County Legislator Kara Hahn and Bruce Sander and Tony DeRosa from the Stony Brook Concerned Homeowners during the press conference at the Stony Brook Fire Department Sub Station #2.

"I will not allow absentee landlords to profit by disturbing the quality of life in our residential neighborhoods," said Supervisor Romaine, "Those who violate our Town Codes should know that our Law Department will do everything in their power to close down illegal multi-family housing and prosecute landlords to the fullest extent of the law."

In reference to off-campus housing, he noted that any students, who are currently living in an illegal multi-family home or considering doing so, should understand clearly that they could be removed at any time if the landlord is found to be in violation, or if health and safety issues are present. "I don't think a student would want to be left without housing in the middle of a semester, but there's a good chance that will happen." He suggested that they ask any prospective landlord for a copy of their rental permit before making a commitment to move in and further explained that if they are given a key to their bedroom door they can rest assured that their tenancy is illegal.

Suffolk County Legislator Hahn said, "The illegal conversion of single family homes into what are, essentially, boarding houses is unfair to the neighborhood and a threat to the health and safety of their student occupants. I applaud the Town for realizing the severity of the situation here in Stony Brook, and how they are working to address these quality of life and safety concerns."

Bruce Sander, Coordinator of the Stony Brook Concerned Homeowners said, "The effect on our neighborhoods is devastating, from the incredible loss in property values, transient population, unkempt homes, additional cars everywhere, blatant violation of town codes, to the out of area owner investors with little or no concern for the neighborhoods or the laws designed to protect the homeowners. Supervisor Romaine has stated that he would dedicate whatever resources are required to change the laws where needed, enforce the current ones and work closely with the community to get this situation resolved once and for all. We are confident that the Supervisor and his Town Board will do whatever is needed to correct the college boarding house infestation that is destroying our single family neighborhoods."

In recent months, the Town has cracked down on landlords who illegally convert single family homes in order to rent rooms for off-campus housing. As a result of the crack down, 50 homes are now the subject of Law Department investigations. Many of the landlords have already been issued appearance tickets for various Town Code violations, or have cases currently pending in District Court. In response to this growing problem, the Supervisor has also worked with the Law and Building Departments to craft new legislation aimed at increasing fines and penalties for those who violate the law and empower the Town to more aggressively enforce the law and attack quality of life issues

town wide. The Supervisor has suggested that the Town prosecutors seek alternative sentences as set forth in Penal Law Section 80.05(5), which will allow the Town to fine violators double the amount of the financial gain based on the commission of the alleged offense.

The new legislation that the Supervisor will present at the April 2 Town Board meeting as resolutions to set public hearings include:

- Amendment to Section 85 that increases maximum fines by 150% for first time offenders, making a maximum fine amount for building code violations \$5,000 per offense up from \$2,000. For second time offenders, the maximum fine increases from \$3,000 to \$10,000.
- Amendment to Section 82 that increases the fines to correspond with Chapter 85 and provide the Town with more power to combat new issues related to illegal student rental housing.
- Amendment to Section 85 aimed at attacking the issue of landlords who pave their front yards to more resemble parking lots than driveways.

Other legislation being considered by the Supervisor includes:

- Revising the Rental Permit registration process and changing the duration of the permit from two years to one year to provide better management and oversight.
- Directing the Tax Assessor to increase property assessment to reflect the change of use from single family residential to multi-family commercial.
- A proposal to register vacant and rental property with the Town Clerk's office.
- Requiring landlords who are seeking a Rental Permit to appear before a board similar to the Accessory Apartment Review Board, allowing open discussion of saturation issues and giving an opportunity for the public to be heard.

Earlier this year, Supervisor Romaine attended a civic meeting where residents voiced their concerns about the growing problem of off-campus student housing in the Stony Brook and Setauket community. At the meeting, the residents spoke of overcrowded houses, paved front yards being used as parking lots, increased on-street parking and traffic, late night parties and more. The Supervisor made a commitment that the Town would increase their efforts to crack down on violators by strictly enforcing Town Codes and increasing the fines and penalties to persuade them to comply with the law. The Supervisor also met with Stony Brook University officials who said that they will cooperate with the Town and help educate the student body as to what they should look for in off-campus housing.

If a resident believes that a home is being used for off-campus student housing in violation Town Code, or a property is in violation of any Town Codes, they should call 451-TOWN (8696) Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. After hours and on weekends, they can call the town's Public Safety dispatch at 631-451-6161.

Division of Public Information * Office of the Supervisor

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